

TOOLKIT for EAPN members ON ENGAGING with the European Semester and the European Pillar of Social Rights

2019

Content / Quick Links

[Introduction](#)

[What is Europe 2020? What is the European Semester?](#)

[Key Instruments – Country Reports, NRPs, CSRs](#)

[What is the European Pillar of Social Rights?](#)

[Indicative Semester Timeline and Checklist for EAPN members](#)

[Engaging at the National Level: Tips and Good Practices](#)

[Who to Contact?](#)

Annex:

- [Recent EU Policy Hooks](#)
- [Quotes for Stakeholder Engagement](#)

Introduction

In 2010, the **Europe 2020 Strategy** broke new ground, by establishing five concrete targets for delivering on smart, social, and sustainable growth (see more information below). This process is implemented annually through a cycle called the **European Semester**, the main instrument for economic coordination between the policies of Member States and for achieving common objectives on Europe 2020.

On the 17 November 2017, the European Union adopted the **European Pillar of Social Rights** (see more information below), a comprehensive initiative of 20 social policy principles, complemented by a Social Scoreboard of indicators, aimed at supporting well-functioning and fair labour markets and welfare systems, with a focus on better integrating and delivering on social concerns. Much of the implementation of this initiative will take place through the **European Semester** framework.

There is therefore a strong case to be made for **the need to urgently and actively engage with these processes**, to ensure that people and planet are put before profit, and that we are moving towards a social and sustainable Europe. Here are the main reasons why:

1. These are dominant EU policy processes for delivering on the EU's economic, employment and social priorities and could provide a **development framework for the European Union and its Member States**, setting out a vision for the future of Europe.
2. **They are direct drivers for EU funding opportunities**, most significantly Structural Funds, which are explicitly linked to the Europe 2020 targets, hence it brings clear benefits to national organisations who engage.
3. The Europe 2020 strategy includes **key targets to reduce poverty**, increase employment and tackle educational exclusions, **but progress has been limited, particularly on the poverty target**.
4. The European Pillar of Social Rights provides a **framework rooted in a rights-based approach** and covers a number of **key social policy domains crucial to the fight against poverty**; it is also expected that the Pillar will play a significant role in the shaping of post-2020 strategy and the EU's next Multiannual Financial Framework.
5. **Stakeholders, including civil society, are supposed to be key partners in the delivery at national and EU level**. However, their involvement remains so far rather marginal, with limited engagement and minimal impact on the policy proposals.

This **Toolkit** is designed to help EAPN members engage during 2019 with the European Semester, delivering on Europe 2020 goals and targets, especially the poverty target, as well as the policy priorities of the European Pillar of Social Rights. It is in line with EAPN's Strategic Plan and Work Programme 2019, and it aims at providing you with brief, to-the-point information about the processes and the opportunities for engagement, by clarifying the key elements, timeline, and strategic actors of the processes, as well as suggesting different ways of involvement.

If any of the terms used in this Toolkit are not clear, please refer to the [Glossary](#) on the EAPN website. For any other query, please contact the [EAPN Europe staff team](#).

What is Europe 2020?

What is the European Semester?

[Europe 2020](#) is a 10-year strategy, proposed by the European Commission on 3 March 2010, aimed at "smart, sustainable, inclusive growth". It takes over from the Lisbon Strategy (which covered the period 2000–2010).

The Strategy identifies five headline targets:

- To raise the employment rate of the population aged 20–64 to at least 75%.
- To achieve the target of investing 3% of GDP in R&D (research & development).
- To reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20% compared to 1990 levels, increase the share of renewable energy in final energy consumption to 20%, and achieve a 20% increase in energy efficiency.
- To reduce the rate of early school leavers to 10% and increase the share of the population aged 30–34 having completed tertiary education to at least 40%.
- **To reduce the number of Europeans living in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million.**

However, according to the most recent [Eurostat](#) data, progress on these targets has been unequal. We are highlighting below the most important targets for EAPN and for our joint work:

Europe 2020 targets	2010 data	Latest available data (2017)	Shortfall
<i>1. Increasing the employment rate of the population aged 20-64 to at least 75%</i>	68.6%	72.2%	-2.8%
<i>4a. Reducing school drop-out rates to less than 10%</i>	13.9%	10.6%	-0.6%
<i>4b. Increasing the share of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary education to at least 40%</i>	33.8%	40.5%¹	+0.5%
<i>5. Lifting at least 20 million out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion</i>	0.5 million increase (compared to the 2008 base year)	4.5 million decrease (compared to the 2008 base year)	-15.5 million people

¹ Provisional data for 2018. The data for 2017 indicates 39.9%.

Monitoring progress and ensuring the active involvement of Member States are key elements of the Strategy. This is done through the [European Semester](#), an annual cycle of macro-economic, budgetary and structural coordination. The key stages in the European Semester are as follows:

- **In November**, the Commission issues its [Annual Growth Survey](#) (AGS), which sets out EU priorities for the coming year. It is discussed in the European Parliament and the Council.
- **In December-January**, the Commission holds bilateral meetings with the Member States, on the process and priorities, and what they mean for each country, as well as the upcoming Country Reports and the state of play of the implementation of Country-Specific Recommendations.
- **In February**, the European Commission issues the [Country Reports](#), tailoring EU priorities (as defined by the Annual Growth Survey) to national contexts, assessing the implementation of the Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) from the previous year (see below), and highlighting key areas of intervention for each Member State. In 2019, they were released on 27 February.
- **In March**, the Commission holds a second round of bilateral meetings with the Member States, to collect feedback on the analysis presented in Country Reports.
- **In March**, EU Heads of State and Government (i.e. the European Spring Council) take stock of the overall macroeconomic situation and of progress towards the Europe 2020 targets, and provide policy orientations covering fiscal, macroeconomic, and structural reforms.
- **In mid-April**, Member States submit their [National Reform Programmes](#) (NRP), which detail how Europe 2020 targets will be reached, what national policies will be implemented, and how the EU guidance has been taken into account from the Country Reports and CSRs (see below). They also prepare Stability / Convergence Programmes for ‘sound public finances’.
- **In May**, the Commission proposes [Country-Specific Recommendations](#) (CSRs) for every Member State, based on the Country Reports and the National Reform Programmes. The CSRs provide tailor-made policy advice to Member States, in areas deemed as priorities.
- **In June**, national Governments discuss the proposed CSRs also in Council formations (EPSCO and others), as well as in advisory bodies (Social Protection Committee, Employment Committee), and in the European Parliament.
- **In July**, the Council formally endorses the Country-Specific Recommendations. Policy guidance is thus given to Member States before they finalise their draft budgets.
- **In the Autumn**, the Eurozone Governments [present the draft budgets to the Commission](#) (in October), which then issues an Opinion on each (which accompany the Annual Growth Survey).

WHEN?	EUROPE 2020 (thematic surveillance)	STABILITY AND GROWTH PACT (macroeconomic & fiscal surveillance)
November	Annual Growth Survey (EC)	
February	Country Reports (EC)	
April	National Reform Programmes (MS)	Stability / Convergence Reports (MS)
May / June / July	Country Specific Recommendations (EC)	
October	Eurozone budget appraisal (EC)	

EC = European Commission; MS = Member States

[\[Home\]](#)

Key Instruments – Country Reports, NRPs, CSRs

Country Reports

As of 2015, the European Commission issues [Country Reports](#) in February, which constitute a detailed analysis of the challenges faces by each particular Member State, as well as policy suggestions for tackling these. The Reports also aim at tailoring the priorities of the Annual Growth Survey to each country's specific national context, as well as at assessing the progress of each Member State in addressing the issues identified in the previous year's Country-Specific Recommendations, including an in-depth review under the Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure. The Reports are intended to provide the basis for dialogue with Member States in bilateral meetings which follow their release, and to feed into the preparation of National Reform Programmes (as well as Stability / Convergence Programmes), to be submitted by Member States in mid-April (see below). They also provide a key moment for stakeholder engagement. Individual Country Reports were presented this year on 27 February.

National Reform Programmes (NRPs)

[National Reform Programmes](#) are the yearly reports prepared by the Member States, demonstrating how they are implementing the Europe 2020 Strategy (past and future actions), the priorities of the Annual Growth Survey, and the Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs – see below) of the previous year. They should describe their implementation of the 5 overarching EU targets to be reached by 2020 (see above), translated into national targets by each Member State. Measures described in the NRPs should be correlated to the national targets, and should be concrete, reflect urgency, and detail budgetary consequences. Each year's NRP should build on the previous, and give emphasis to implementation of the CSRs.

Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs)

The [Country Specific Recommendations](#) are policy recommendations made by the European Commission for each country within the European Semester, based on a review of that Member State's economic and social performance in the previous year, and on how far they are delivering on the EU-wide priorities set out in the Annual Growth Survey. The recommendations are concrete, targeted and measurable, and concentrate on what can realistically be achieved in the next 12-18 months. The CSRs are drafted by the European Commission, after a thorough assessment of progress since the previous year's CSRs, and a detailed analysis of the National Reform Programmes and Stability / Convergence Programmes, submitted by Member States in April. The CSRs are debated in the Council formations (EPSCO etc) and their advisory bodies (EPC, EMCO, and SPC), before being discussed and endorsed by Heads of State or Government at the European Council in June. The final adoption of the CSRs in July concludes the European Semester. The work is then handed over to the Member States for implementation. This year, Country-Specific Recommendations will be presented by the European Commission on 5 June.

What is the European Pillar of Social Rights?

[The European Pillar of Social Rights](#) (EPSR) was originally announced by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in September 2015, and it is part of a greater initiative to strengthen the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), and, implicitly, its social dimension, by ensuring upward social convergence between Member States. It is a **comprehensive package of social policy initiatives**, officially adopted as a [Proclamation](#) in Gothenburg in November 2017.

Key elements of the European Pillar of Social Rights include:

- **20 policy principles** in different social policy areas
- **a Social Scoreboard of 14 indicators**, to monitor the implementation of the principles
- **a number of key legislative and non-legislative initiatives** to deliver on the principles, notably on access to social protection, access to information on employment rights, working time, and work-life balance. See *Social Fairness Package* below in this section.

The European Semester (see above) will serve as main framework for the implementation of policy guidance and recommendations on the proposed 20 policy principles, at national and EU level – with the main responsibility lying with national Governments. While it falls short of being a transformative, integrated European strategy to eradicate poverty, EAPN’s focus is to push for it to go **beyond a framework of principles and become a framework of rights that can make a real difference to people’s right to a life free of poverty**. You can read our detailed analysis and recommendations in [EAPN’s position paper on the European Pillar of Social Rights](#).

20 policy domains

In the EU ISG meeting of June 2017, the decision was made for EAPN to focus especially on five of the [twenty policy domains](#) which make up the European Pillar of Social Rights. They are marked in bold below. EAPN strongly supports the continued reference to the Council Recommendation on Active Inclusion as key framework to support implementation, ensuring access to adequate income support, quality and affordable services, and inclusive labour markets.

Equal Opportunities and access to the labour market

- 1. Education, training and lifelong learning**
2. Gender Equality
3. Equal Opportunities
4. Active Support to employment

Fair Working Conditions

5. Secure and adaptable employment
- 6. Wages**
7. Information about employment conditions in case of dismissals
8. Social dialogue and involvement of workers
9. Work-life balance
10. Healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment and data protection

Social Protection and Inclusion

11. Childcare and support to children
- 12. Social Protection**
13. Unemployment Benefits
- 14. Minimum Income**
15. Old age income and pensions
16. Health care
17. Inclusion of people with disabilities
18. Long-term care
19. Housing and assistance for homeless
- 20. Access to essential services**

Social Scoreboard

The [Social Scoreboard](#) will track trends and performances across Member States in 14 areas, and will feed into the European Semester. The monitoring process looks at levels and yearly changes of the headline indicators, as compared to EU averages, and classifies Member States in one of seven categories: *best performers, better than average, good but to monitor, on average / neutral, weak but improving, to watch, and critical situations*. The statistical results are to be interpreted in conjunction with qualitative analysis provided in the Country Reports (released on 27 February 2019), which will underpin the Country-Specific Recommendations (to be released in May 2019).

The headline indicators of the Social Scoreboard are:Equal opportunities and access to the labour market:

1. Share of early leavers from education and training, age 18-24
2. Gender gap in employment rate, age 20-64
3. Income inequality measured as quintile share ratio - S80/S20
4. At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate (AROPE)
5. Young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET rate), age 15-24

Dynamic labour markets and fair working conditions:

6. Employment rate, age 20-64
7. Unemployment rate, age 15-74
8. Long-term unemployment rate, age 15-74
9. Gross disposable income of households in real terms, per capita
10. Net earnings of a full-time single worker earning the average wage

Public support / Social protection and inclusion:

11. Impact of social transfers (other than pensions) on poverty reduction
12. Children aged less than 3 years in formal childcare
13. Self-reported unmet need for medical care
14. Share of population with basic overall digital skills or above

Social Fairness Package

On 13 March 2018, the European Commission adopted the [Social Fairness Package](#), which contains a main [Communication](#) regarding the implementation of the Social Pillar, as well as proposals to take further initiatives on access to social protection for all workers and the European Labour authority (see below for details). You can read more our detailed analysis in [EAPN's response paper to the Social Fairness Package](#).

- **Access to Social Protection for All Workers**

The Commission feels that rights and obligations associated to social protection have benefited primarily workers on standard contracts, whereas they insufficiently cover those in self-employment and non-standard employment, which has led to new precariousness and inequalities. The initiative is aimed at providing as many people as possible with social security cover, including self-employed and gig-economy workers. A [public consultation](#) was carried out at the end of 2017 – read EAPN’s response [here](#), and the European Commission summary of responses [here](#). A proposal for a Council Recommendation (soft law initiative) outlining next steps in this area was put forward as part of the Social Fairness Package. Following the proposal, the EPSCO Council reached a political agreement on its 6-7 December session. The final text can be consulted [here](#), and an EAPN fuller assessment will be upcoming.

- **European Labour Authority**

The Commission equally launched another [public consultation](#) regarding the establishment of a [European Labour Authority](#), an initiative aimed at facilitating access for individuals and employers to information on their rights and obligations, as well as to relevant services, and supporting EU cross-border cooperation in matters related to labour markets. EAPN did not respond to the public consultation, but participated in stakeholder dialogues with DG Employment. A legislative proposal ([Regulation](#)) was put forward by the European Commission as part of the Social Fairness Package, on which a provisional agreement for implementation was reached in February 2019. The agreement will be submitted to the Council's Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper) for approval, after which it will be subject to a final vote in the European Parliament. The Authority should be up and running in 2019 and reach its full operational capacity by 2023.

Other initiatives related to the European Pillar of Social Rights

- **Work-Life Balance Package**

This initiative sets a number of new or higher minimum standards for parental, paternity and carer's leave, intended in particular to increase possibilities for men to take up parental and caring responsibilities. The most significant element is [a proposal for a Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers](#). For more details on this initiative, as well as complementary non-legislative proposals, see [here](#).

- **Written Statement Directive**

This Directive gives employees starting a new job the right to be notified in writing of the essential aspects of their employment relationship. In this framework, the European Commission put forward a [proposal for a Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions](#), aimed at addressing insufficient protection for workers in more precarious jobs. A [political agreement](#) was reached in February 2019, and the Parliament and Council have now to adopt their formal position under the co-decision procedure for the text to become EU law. See more details [here](#).

- **Working Time Directive**

Based on a growing body of case law, the Commission is providing guidance on how to interpret various aspects of this Directive. See more details [here](#).

Indicative Semester Timeline and Checklist for EAPN members

<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Europe 2020 / European Pillar of Social Rights</i>	<i>EAPN Action National level</i>
November 2018	21 November - The European Commission issues its Autumn Package, including the Annual Growth Survey (AGS), which sets out EU priorities for next year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact key interlocutors (see <i>Who To Contact</i> section) to disseminate the Poverty Watch and provide input for the Country Reports. • Provide feedback on EAPN's draft response to the AGS by the staff team.
December 2018 – February 2019	The European Commission holds bilateral meetings in Member States on the Country Reports. 27 February – The Commission issues Country Reports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to contact key interlocutors and to press for a stakeholder engagement process and try to get engaged with the bilateral meetings. • Read the Country Report and prepare for the session in the EU ISG meeting.
March 2019	21 – 22 March - European Spring Council issues guidance for national policies, on the basis of the AGS. The European Commission holds a second round of bilateral meetings in Member States.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 - 23 March in Riga: Attend EU ISG meeting - working together on Country Reports and CSRs 2019. • Send email written input on your analysis of your Country Report and put forward proposals for alternative CSRs; provide feedback on the synthesis response report prepared by EAPN staff. • Contact key interlocutors to give input to NRPs in April, based on Poverty Watches, Country Reports and template letter + try to get engaged with political missions and bilateral meetings.
April 2019	15 April – Member States submit their National Reform Programmes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read your NRP and review it together with your Network or Organisation, checking it against your inputs; issue a Press Release, send your reaction to your Government and key contacts. • Attend EAPN Europe's capacity-building webinar on the Semester. • Organise national events to support the implementation of the Social Pillar.
May 2019	9 May – Sibiu Summit on the Future of Europe 22 – 26 May – European Parliament elections	Continue engaging at the national level with key stakeholders, organise events (Poverty Watch, Social Pillar), get engaged with EP election campaigns.

June 2019	<p>5 June – The European Commission proposes Country Specific Recommendations, after having assessed the NRPs.</p> <p>The Council formations and the European Parliament discuss the CSRs. The European Council endorses them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 – 15 June in Brussels: Attend EAPN’s policy conference and EU ISG meeting (joint work on the NRPs / CSRs). • Review your CSRs, read and validate the response prepared by the staff team. • Send the completed Semester questionnaire to the staff team. • Begin development of national Poverty Watch assessment. • Continue organising national events on the European Pillar of Social Rights.
July 2019	The Council formally endorses the CSRs.	Send email comments to the staff team on the draft Semester assessment report, the Poverty Watch synthesis, and the post 2020 strategy paper.
September 2019	<p>National Semester: Member States present their draft budget to their Parliaments and implement their NRPs and the CSRs. The European Parliament adopts resolution on the CSRs.</p> <p>The Commission staff (desk officers) begin the drafting of the Country Report</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 – 15 September (<i>tbc</i>) in Helsinki: Attend EU ISG meeting and GA, joint work on the European Semester and next steps, Poverty Watch, Social Pillar. • Finalise and start disseminating updates on Poverty Watch reports to key contacts, lobbying for input into the Country Reports + organise national events. • Reflect on key messages for the upcoming Annual Growth Survey.
October 2019	15 October - Member States in the Euro area present their national draft budgets to the European Commission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue pressing for stakeholder engagement and try to feed into the drafting of the Country Report, using the national Poverty Watch assessment, as your other inputs. • Continue organising national events, on the Poverty Watches / Social Pillar.
November 2019 - January 2020	<p>The European Commission issues its Autumn Package, including the Annual Growth Survey (AGS), which sets out EU priorities for next year.</p> <p>The Commission begins a new round of bilateral meetings and fact-finding missions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide input on the draft response to the AGS prepared by the staff team. • Continue pressing for stakeholder engagement and try to feed into the drafting of the Country Report, using the national Poverty Watch assessment, as your other inputs.

Throughout all our work on the European Semester, EU ISG members will lobby and directly engage to ensure follow-up for the priority policy domains of the European Pillar of Social Rights and associated Social Scoreboard, as well as will monitor to what extent this is done by the European Commission and Member States.

Engaging at the National Level: Tips and Good Practices

1. Identify who is responsible for the European Semester in your country and at the EU level

In each delegation of the European Commission's representation in your country, a *European Semester Officer* is charged with ensuring the link on all European Semester matters. Equally, the Directorate General for Employment in the European Commission in Brussels has dedicated *country desks* working on Europe 2020, as well as on Structural Funds. These players are important both as sources of information, as well as key targets for your lobbying, so it is key to establish and maintain contact. Based on previous years' experience, and according to our members' input, it is often the Economy or Finance Ministry, or Prime Minister's Office, who drafts the NRPs, with more or less (depending on the country) input from other Ministries, such as Employment and Social Affairs, Environment etc. Find all relevant information in the [Who to Contact?](#) section below.

2. Ask to be invited to participate in stakeholder engagement

Write, e-mail or call the relevant contacts now (early 2019) and ask what process will be developed to involve stakeholders in the discussions on the Country Reports, the NRPs and CSRs this year, as well as in the delivery of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Ask to be invited as one of the stakeholders representing anti-poverty organisations and working with people experiencing poverty, highlighting your expertise and previous engagement with these processes. You can find a suggested template letter [here](#), and useful references supporting stakeholder involvement in European documents in the [Annex](#) at the end of this document. You should insist on your Government's responsibility to ensure a meaningful, timely, and structured process of consultation and involvement. EAPN's overall aim is not to be only involved in one-off consultations, but to build strong and regular dialogue platforms.

3. Brief members and build a common position

If you are going to be able to make a submission or contribution, it is important to stimulate debate with other members of your Network or Organisation, and to develop together a common position. This brings a lot of added value to any response you might want to make, and engages the Network / Organisation in the work. Some members strive to include the direct participation of people experiencing poverty, which is a good practice that EAPN fully encourages. This means briefing them, using this Toolkit and the other examples, and analysing together your national context. Organizing capacity building sessions can be very useful. You should start by analysing the current social situation in your country, the key trends, and the impact of policy decisions and the EU policy recommendations on people experiencing poverty, building consensus on the main policy changes you think are necessary. This will help you in the preparation of Poverty Watches, as well as for providing concrete input into Europe 2020, European Semester, and European Pillar of Social Rights processes, at national and EU level.

4. Making your input: Developing key messages

Starting from the analysis and common position above, members should put together their national Poverty Watch assessment, and engage in stakeholder processes to feed it into the Country Reports. Communicate your position to European Commission representatives, such as the European Semester Officers and the country desk officers. This work can also be used as a basis for trying to influence the National Reform Programme – be prepared to send at short notice the key messages that you want to put forward, based on your analysis of the main trends. Sometimes, a few crucial points make more of an impact than a long list of demands. If you are able to see a draft NRP, you will often have a very short time to respond. Having prepared your key messages beforehand will help you to be able to provide quick, but effective input within the tight deadlines. Finally, this work will enable you to quickly assess your Country-Specific Recommendations in May. You can take inspiration from EAPN’s joint reviews of the NRPs and common work on Country Reports and CSRs (see [here](#)).

5. Review your country’s Country Report and CSRs

Analyse the key weaknesses of the Country Report against your own Poverty Watch and key messages, stressing also to what extent the principles of the Social Pillar are taken into account. Try to get involved in bilateral meetings between your Government and the European Commission, through your European Semester Officer, aiming also to influence the NRP, produced by your Governments, as well as the CSRs, produced by the European Commission. It is clear that the CSRs are increasingly important, impacting on national policy priorities. Once they are released, compare the alternative CSRs prepared by your Network for your country to those issued by the European Commission, commenting on how far the proposals are the same, and highlighting gaps. Prepare comments on the implementation of the CSRs, including how far they are taken up by the NRPs. This work will be carried out with the support of the staff team, through detailed work during EU ISG meetings, as well as through collecting written feedback in between. A consistent focus throughout will be the evaluation of to what extent the priority policy domains of the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as the associated Social Scoreboard, are taken on board. Make sure to disseminate both your national inputs, as well as the EU synthesis reports, to all relevant contacts.

6. Build alliances

Last years’ experience of stakeholder involvement showed that there is still a lot to be desired in most countries. In the current negative context, it is also difficult to make progress on poverty on our own. It is important that you try to build strong alliances with other organizations that share our values and concerns – a key partner are trade unions, but also with other NGOs (including environmental NGOs) or NGO platforms, academics, politicians, the media. Useful interlocutors and allies can be the members of the Social Protection Committee and the Employment Committee (advisory bodies of the European Commission made up of national Ministry officials). Equally, the European Semester Officer in your country, and the country desk officers in the European Commission. It is important to try to establish an ongoing dialogue with them and send your inputs/messages and proposals. If possible, try to get your National Parliaments engaged, as well as your Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). Also, think creatively to find ways to support the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs to have their say in all policy areas, and not to be squeezed out by overarching economic and financial constraints in the drafting process. Making allies at all levels is a very important part of the process.

7. Disseminating your message and promoting public debate

Given the current weakness of the stakeholder engagement process, it's important not to keep your messages internal to your dialogue with the Government. Think how best you can disseminate your messages to key actors and how to get your messages out to the public. This can mean organising national lobbying events, or getting involved with those organised by other stakeholders. Inviting high-level speakers, such as the European Semester Officer or SPC / EMCO members, can be very useful and can also help strengthen future relations. Working in alliances (see above) will be crucial to this. It is always useful to involve media (including social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn, blogs, forums) to convey your messages more widely to the general public, and raise awareness on the process and concerns.

*

* *

In addition to the tips provided in this section, members are invited to consult EAPN's publication [Giving a Voice to Citizens – Building stakeholder engagement for effective decision making](#) (2014), launched at the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty in Brussels. It provides common principles, concrete tools and tips to help policy makers take the important step of putting effective stakeholder dialogue into practice, drawing on concrete inspiring practices – at the EU, national and subnational levels. See below for some positive practices from our members.

Examples of Good Practices

Members of EAPN's EU Inclusion Strategies Group have identified different ways of engaging in a more pro-active way with Europe 2020 and the European Semester, and more broadly with anti-poverty policy. Several EAPN networks have succeeded in participating in meetings with European Commission officials, as well as in different forms of dialogue with their Governments. For more information and support, please contact the [staff team](#).

EAPN Spain

We submitted proposals to the Government on the NRP, as every year, while also securing an interview with the Economic Office of the government, in charge of drafting the NRP. The proposals were added to the text at the end, together with those of the Trade Unions, Employers, and the Federation of Local Authorities. The submission incorporated an evaluation of the previous NRP, the Country Report and the 2017 Recommendations, explaining the pending issues, such as the Social Pillar, the SDGs and an urgent poverty strategy. Once the NRP got published, they ran a comparison table between their proposal and the final content, taking into account the results of the budget negotiation at the Parliament. EAPN Spain is also carrying out a technical support project on the European Pillar of Social Rights, for the Ministry of Healthcare, Consumption and Social Welfare. The project's goal is the dissemination of the Pillar in several Autonomous Communities, during 2018 and 2019. These meetings are a very good opportunity to talk about Europe; not only the Pillar and its Scoreboard are explained, but there is also an exchange about the interrelations among the Pillar and the Sustainable Development Goals (2030 Agenda), and tips about the practical implementation at the regional and local level. For more information, contact [Graciela Malgesini](#) (EAPN Spain)

EAPN Poland

The Polish Government's official Europe 2020 task force for stakeholder involvement in the implementation Europe 2020 Strategy is in operation from 2012 (established by Prime Minister order) and, after initial problems, now it enables all stakeholders to participate in the NRP drafting process every year. From 2014 there is a yearly special working meeting focusing on poverty. That was a commitment made by Government as a proof that they still have poverty as high on the agenda, despite great achievements in reduction of the risk of poverty and social exclusion. EAPN Poland's representative was active in Europe 2020 body meetings, raising issues related to poverty. We recently (2018) presented EAPN Poland's Poverty Watch report at the meeting of the task force along with the Government Statistical Office, and representatives of the social ministry EAPN Poland and other stakeholders send proposals and amendments to the Country Report and mainly to the NRP draft. Some of them are included in the final text, others are rejected with an explanation (all presented in a well organised table). We participate in several meetings of the task force every year and in fact-finding missions and Country Report presentations organised by the European Commission. The task force with broad representation of stakeholders gives us an opportunity to discuss poverty issues with government representatives from different ministries and disseminate our messages within broad and influential audience. For more information, contact [Ryszard Szarfenberg](#) (EAPN Poland).

EAPN Finland

A Board member of EAPN Finland was asked to speak about the Finnish Country Report at a seminar organised by a Member of the European Parliament. EAPN Finland prepared its own shadow Country-Specific Recommendations, which were widely circulated to stakeholders. In connection with the publication of the European Commission CSRs, EAPN Finland made a statement together with SOSTE - The Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health. EAPN Finland communicates on a regular basis with the European Semester Officer. Together with SOSTE, they organised a training and hearing event for NGOs with the European Commission's delegation, during a fact-finding mission. EAPN Finland produced a Poverty Watch and circulated it to stakeholders and in social media. The publication was also distributed in different events. EAPN Finland organized, with SOSTE, in Helsinki a seminar called "More human Europe", with a strong focus on the European Pillar of Social Rights, bringing together NGOs and MEPs in panel discussions on poverty and civil society engagement. EAPN Finland also had an event in Tampere with the same theme. EAPN Finland and SOSTE launched a publication [Future of Europe – Reforming the policies of the European Union](#) (FI, EN), with several articles dealing with the Social Pillar and the European Semester. For more information, contact [Anna Järvinen](#) (EAPN Finland).

EAPN Lithuania

We met with the European Semester Officer and discussed about the Country. EAPN Lithuania has never been invited to submit proposals for the NRP. However, our Poverty Watch got some attention, as it was sent to the desk officer, the European Semester Officer, and the Prime Minister. Official answers were received from several Ministries (Social Affairs and Labour, Finance, Education, Justice) about our concerns and consider our suggestions. Many issues from the Poverty Watch were also mentioned in the Country Report 2019 (income inequality, educational inequalities, housing issues, lack of stakeholders cooperation in terms of reaching the most vulnerable, etc). EAPN Lithuania also presented this work in an EAPN Europe event in the European Parliament, and participated in the EU Civil Society round table review, organised by DG Employment with the aim to gather feedback on the 2019 Country Reports. For more information, contact [Rimgailė Matulionytė](#) (EAPN Lithuania).

In 2014, EAPN led a European Commission funded project called the *Semester Alliance*, bringing together EU stakeholders to impact the European Semester and Europe 2020, from a cross-sectoral social, equality, and environmental perspective. In this framework, three pilots were also supported in Bulgaria, Denmark, and Ireland, to establish similar national, broad alliances to engage in the European Semester, all led by the EAPN National Networks in those countries. While the Alliance does not receive funding anymore, the Brussels-level and the national level alliances continue their activities. See more on their [blog](#), and details about Ireland below.

EAPN Ireland

The governance process for the Irish NRP was broadly similar to most previous years, with an invitation to different stakeholders, including Civil Society Organisations and EAPN Ireland, to make submissions. These organisations also get to comment on a draft NRP. There have been no specific meetings or events to discuss the NRP, but in the NRP it is highlighted that this engagement happens in an ongoing manner across different policy areas. EAPN Ireland made an initial submission to the NRP and also commented on a draft. The Better Europe Alliance (Irish Civil Society Organisations for a Social and Sustainable Europe, involves a range of social and equality NGOs, the Environmental Pillar and the SIPTU trade union), which is coordinated by EAPN Ireland, also sent its response to the European Commission's 2018 Country Report for Ireland as a submission to the NRP. The Irish NRP for 2018 included an Annex that summarised all the recommendations from Civil Society Organisations and the issues from the submissions. The engagement should continue as a regular dialogue throughout the policy cycle including implementation, evaluation and development of new approaches. While the European Commission office in Dublin meets with different stakeholders, including civil society organisations, as part of structured engagement on the Semester process, the Government does not. This is referred to in the 2019 Country Report, which states that social partners "are rarely involved and consulted in relation to the European Semester process by the government". For more information, contact [Paul Ginnell](#) (EAPN Ireland)

[\[Home\]](#)

Who to Contact?

Below you can find your best points of entry for your work on Europe 2020, the European Semester, and the European Pillar of Social Rights. You should develop an on-going relationship with them, organise joint meetings, and send them all your inputs. These contacts are nationals from your own country, or at least speak the country's language and are familiar with its context.

European Semester Officers

The Commission has deployed the so-called *European Semester Officers* in the Commission's Representations in the Member States. They are supposed to be working in partnership with stakeholders and oversee the implementation of the Country-Specific Recommendations. Please consult the [websites of the European Commission Representations](#), or access a full list with contact information [here](#).

Country Desk Officers in DG Employment

Within DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission, there are country desks, with teams dedicated to policy analysis and recommendations for each country. They are the main authors of the Country Reports and the Country Specific Recommendations. You can access a full list with contact information [here](#).

Members of the Social Protection Committee / Employment Committee

The [Social Protection Committee](#) (SPC) and the [Employment Committee's](#) (EMCO) are EU advisory policy committees for the Employment and Social Affairs Ministers in the Employment and Social Affairs Council (EPSCO). They are made up of representatives from national Employment and Social Affairs Ministries. Aside close monitoring of the European Semester, the SPC equally engaged with issues such as social protection, social inclusion, health, long-term care, and pensions in Member States, under the Social Open Method of Coordination.

- You can access a full list with SPC members contact information [here](#).
- You can access a full list with EMCO members contact information [here](#).

European Social Policy Network

Previously called the *Independent Experts on Social Inclusion*, the [European Social Policy Network](#) (ESPN) was established in 2014 to provide the Commission with independent information, analysis and expertise on social policies, particularly in the framework of the Europe 2020 and the European Semester. It also acts as the staff team to the [MISSOC \(Mutual Information Systems on Social Protection\)](#). You can access a full list with contact information [here](#).

Europe 2020 Country-Specific Information

Upon clicking on [this link](#), select your country from the list. You can thus access all European Semester documents (Country Reports, NRPs, CSRs etc), as well as statistics and indicators about the progress on the national targets for Europe 2020.

For more information, please contact the EAPN Staff team:

Sian Jones, Policy Coordinator: sian.jones@eapn.eu

Amana Ferro, Senior Policy Officer: amana.ferro@eapn.eu

[\[Home\]](#)

Annex:

Recent EU Policy Hooks

In formulating your positions, you might find it useful to refer to the following “policy hooks”, put together from recent European-level documents.

Annual Growth Survey & Joint Employment Report

As indicated in the first section of this Toolkit, the Autumn Package (including the [Annual Growth Survey](#) and the [Joint Employment Report](#)) marks the launch of the European Semester, by setting out the broad EU economic priorities for the year to come, and assessing progress on key employment and social policy areas. Last year, it was adopted on 21 November 2018.

EAPN had sent a [letter to European Commission President](#) Jean-Claude Juncker in advance of the release, with key messages from EAPN’s joint Semester work. Following the launch, EAPN posted a [quick reaction](#), as well as prepared a [full response](#), highlighting positive areas that may be useful to quote, as well as missed opportunities and key Recommendations (see below).

EAPN’s Key Recommendations are:

- 1. Rebalance macroeconomic policies to achieve social rights and poverty reduction**
- 2. Set out an Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights**
- 3. Reduce poverty with an integrated strategy based on Active Inclusion**
- 4. Invest in adequate income for all – guaranteeing minimum income and social protection as a social right!**
- 5. Give priority to fair living wages and personalized support into quality jobs**
- 6. Promote a holistic approach to Education and Lifelong Learning as a social right**
- 7. Prioritize right to essential, affordable services – particularly housing and health**
- 8. Use EU funds and Reform Support Instrument for social investment in social rights**
- 9. Make Civil Society equal partners in the European Semester**

The main message from the AGS 2019 is that the EU is continuing to expand economic growth that is leading to jobs that take people out of poverty. However, although the AGS underlines that growth is not benefiting all citizens, it does not propose a systematic shift towards a different model, investing in fairer redistribution systems and a rights-based, social and sustainable development approach. The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) is said to be fully integrated, but most of the social inclusion and social protection proposals are restricted, with little details, and seen primarily through the lens of instruments for growth and jobs, underpinned by trickle-down theory. Whilst some nuances have been introduced into the 3 AGS priorities, referencing the need to promote inclusiveness, as well as productivity growth and institutional quality in structural reforms, together with new funds and link to EU funds, it is not clear how far this will be used for social investment in social rights. Overall, whilst the AGS 2019 takes some welcome steps with increased mentions of poverty and social rights as well as to the role of civil society, it falls short of rebalancing economic and social goals or a road map to deliver concretely on poverty and social rights, implementing the EPSR and the Agenda 2030 SDGs, with people in poverty and NGOs as key partners.

[\[Home\]](#)

Annex:

Quotes for Stakeholder Engagement

Europe 2020 Communication

The original [Europe 2020 Strategy Communication of the European Commission](#) underlined the importance of a partnership approach:

This partnership approach should extend to EU committees, to national parliaments and national, local and regional authorities, to social partners and to stakeholders and civil society so that everyone is involved in delivering on the vision.

and

The success of the new strategy will therefore depend critically on the European Union's institutions, Member States and regions explaining clearly why reforms are necessary – and inevitable to maintain our quality of life and secure our social models –, where Europe and its Member States want to be by 2020, and what contribution they are looking for from citizens, businesses and their representative organisation.

Employment Guidelines

The [Council Decision](#) on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States mentions in **Recital 5**:

[The European Semester's] employment and social focus has notably been strengthened, and dialogue with the Member States, the social partners and representatives of civil society has been deepened.

and in **Recital 11**:

While the Integrated Guidelines are addressed to Member States and the Union, they should be implemented in partnership with all national, regional and local authorities, closely involving parliaments, as well as the social partners and representatives of civil society.

and in **Guideline 7 - Enhancing the functioning of labour markets and the effectiveness of social dialogue**:

Where relevant and building on existing national practices, Member States should take into account the experience on employment and social issues of relevant civil society organisations.

Annual Growth Survey

In **2018**, the [Annual Growth Survey](#) contains two explicit mentions of civil society as a key stakeholder in Europe 2020. The first one is in the context of the rule of law, effective justice systems and robust anti-corruption frameworks:

This needs to be coupled with transparency and integrity in the public sector, effective legal protection of whistle-blowers, the presence of independent media and more engagement with civil society.

while the second one is the final sentence of the document:

Member States should ensure that social partners and national parliaments are fully involved in the reform process. Their involvement, along with a broader engagement with civil society, is fundamental to improving ownership and legitimacy of reforms and bringing about better socio-economic outcomes.

Communication accompanying the Country Reports 2019

[Country Reports](#) were released this year on 27 February 2019, and were accompanied, as every year, by an overarching [Communication](#), containing the following reference:

To provide an appropriate and sustainable response to the challenges, the Commission recommends that those programmes would be prepared with the involvement of all key stakeholders, such as social partners, regional and local authorities, and civil society organisations as appropriate.

The European Pillar of Social Rights

[Delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights website:](#)

Making the European Pillar of Social Rights a reality for citizens is a joint responsibility. While most of the tools to deliver on the Pillar are in the hands of Member States, as well as social partners and civil society, the European Union institutions – and the European Commission in particular – can help by setting the framework and giving the direction.

[Statement of President Juncker on the Proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights:](#)

The Pillar – and Europe’s social dimension as a whole – will only be as strong as we allow it to be. This is a joint responsibility and it starts at national, regional and local level, with a key role for social partners and civil society. Therefore, while fully respecting and embracing the different approaches which exist across Europe, we all now need to turn commitments into action. Europeans deserve nothing less.

[Social Fairness Package](#)

There are several references to civil society in the [Communication on monitoring the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights](#), which is part of the Package, namely:

Delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights has always been conceived as a shared political commitment and responsibility. EU Institutions, Member States, public authorities, social partners and civil society organisations at all levels have a crucial role to play, in line with their competences.

and

The Commission is also committed to supporting Member States, social partners and civil society organisations in the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights at national, regional and local level.

and

Most of the competences and tools required to deliver on the European Pillar of Social Rights are in the hands of local, regional and national authorities, social partners as well as civil society.

and

A more thematic follow-up will also be required to cover the depth of the various principles of the Pillar and to review effective follow-up and take-up on the ground. [...] In turn, EU-level social partners and civil society organisations may decide to focus more deeply on certain principles of particular interest to them.

[\[Home\]](#)

INFORMATION AND CONTACT

For more information on this publication, contact:

Amana Ferro, EAPN Senior Policy Officer
amana.ferro@eapn.eu – 0032 2 226 58 50

For more information on EAPN policy positions, contact:

Sian Jones, EAPN Policy Coordinator:
sian.jones@eapn.eu – 0032 2 226 58 59

For more information on EAPN general publications and activities, see www.eapn.eu

The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) is an independent network of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and groups involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the Member States of the European Union, established in 1990.



EUROPEAN ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK. Reproduction permitted, provided that appropriate reference is made to the source. February 2018.



This publication has received financial support from the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation "EaSI" (2014-2020). For further information please consult: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi>

The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission. Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission may be held responsible for use of any information contained in this publication. For any use or reproduction of photos which are not under European Union copyright, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holder(s).